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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM KCOR ASEC NI

SUBJECT: DEMONSTRATORS ALLEGE IMPROPRIETY BY EDO STATE GOVERNOR REGARDING BURN VICTIM ASSISTANCE

1. Summary: A group advocating for Edo State burn victims delivered a letter to the Embassy accusing the Edo State governor of improper handling of burn victim assistance funds. End Summary.

2. On Tuesday morning, June 29, about 50 demonstrators disembarked from a bus and assembled in a traffic circle about 100 meters from the embassy, where mobile police prevented them from approaching. When RSO told the demonstrators they couldn't protest there, they presented RSO with a letter "for the ambassador."

3. The letter is from the Kerosene Fire Victims Welfare Association (KEVA), a group acting on behalf of the over 1,000 victims of a series of explosions and fires in Edo State in 2001. Background: The explosions are recounted on a Lagos-based NGO's website:
. End Background.

4. In the letter, KEVA objects to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Edo State government and the Body Enhancement Annual Reconstructive Surgery (BEARS) foundation, to carry out plastic surgery for about 50 burn victims. BEARS will arrange for a group of American plastic surgeons to visit Nigeria to perform the surgery, at a total cost of N106 million (about \$752,000).

5. KEVA alleges that the Edo government will pay the BEARS foundation from a fund of donations that the government has received as a trustee for the victims. The victims, therefore, essentially will be paying for their own surgery, contradicting the BEARS Foundation's mission that all surgeries performed through BEARS are at no cost to the victims.

6. KEVA accuses Edo State Governor Chief Lucky Igbinedion of arranging the surgeries at Igbinedion Hospital in Okada, Edo State, which is owned by the Governor's father. KEVA further claims that Igbinedion Hospital was built on land that was illegally confiscated from the community.

7. The World Health Organization (WHO), says KEVA, has offered to perform the surgery overseas for free, helping 200 patients at a total cost of N26 million (about \$185,000) for transportation only.

8. Comment. The demonstrators arrived and departed quietly after presenting their letter to RSO. When Emboff went to discuss the matter, the group was already leaving the area. End Comment.

CAMPBELL